

SESSION 3

Sure of the Truth



QUESTION 1:

When have you believed something that turned out not to be true?

THE POINT

Truth is found in Jesus alone.

THE PASSAGE

1 John 2:18-29

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

It seems our culture has become increasingly less adept at determining what is true and what is not. In a culture of 24-hour news feed and online opinions masquerading as fact, it should be no surprise that many Americans believe ideas that are nothing more than conspiracy theories. In fact, half of Americans believe at least one conspiracy theory.¹ For example:

- ▶ 40 percent believe the FDA is withholding natural cures for cancer.²
- ▶ 27 percent believe America is hiding aliens in Area 51.
- ▶ 23 percent believe 9/11 was an inside job.
- ▶ 19 percent believe the government is using chemicals to control the population.³

Typically, conspiracy theories start with some fringe group and then are picked up by some credible source. It's hard to know what to believe with all the differing opinions that are out there. People are confused about a lot of things which, in turn, produces doubt.

It goes without saying that the struggle for truth is real. However, there is good news! Absolute truth does exist, and it is found in Jesus Christ.

1 John 2:18-21

18 Children, it is the last hour. And as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. By this we know that it is the last hour.

19 They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. However, they went out so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us.

20 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.

21 I have not written to you because you don't know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie comes from the truth.

KEY WORDS: **The last hour** (2:18)—That time between Jesus' first and second comings, often considered a time of intense conflict between God and Satan.

Antichrist (2:18)—Persons who oppose Christ or substitute themselves for Christ (1 John 2:18,22; 4:3; 2 John 7).

Anointing (2:20)—An action, process, or state of being of having the Holy Spirit live in a person and impacting his or her life.

Holy One (2:20)—A title referring to God as separate, distinct; this applies to all three Persons of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit).

Since the coming of Jesus, believers have known they were living in the “last days.” The expression *last hour* is only found here in the New Testament and is synonymous with the idea of the last days. The phrase points to the imminent return of Christ and the final judgment. For believers, this is a day of joyful expectation. However, for the unbeliever, this will be a day of judgment and punishment. Every man’s heart will be laid bare before the Lord. All those who trusted in Christ and persevered in righteousness will receive eternal life. But those who persisted in unbelief and acts of unrighteousness will receive eternal death.

John highlighted the reality of the last hour by telling us, “antichrist is coming.” Paul described this same figure as “the man of lawlessness” and “the man doomed to destruction” (2 Thess. 2:3-4). In the future, this man will set himself up to oppose God. In the meantime, “many antichrists have come.” While the last days will involve a central figure who will oppose Christ, multiple antichrists also exist, who even now are working in opposition to the kingdom of God.

Jesus taught that “false messiahs and false prophets will arise” with the goal of deceiving others and opposing Christ (Matt. 24:24). These are individuals who are opposed to the clear teaching of Scripture, primarily the doctrine of Christ. John reminded us of their existence so that we would not be caught off guard by them. False prophets and antichrists will arise, seeking to deceive. The presence of these false teachers is a sign of the end times.

False teaching is prevalent in our contemporary culture. For example, one highly popular pop artist is quoted as saying, “What I’ve discovered is that in art, as in music, there’s a lot of truth—and then there’s a lie. The artist is essentially creating his work to make this lie a truth, but he slides it in amongst all the others. The tiny little lie is the moment I live for, my moment.”⁴ Here’s a hugely popular singer whose goal is to convince her listeners to accept a lie! In the same manner, this is the moment all false teachers live for: a deception that mixes a lie with the truth.

QUESTION 2:

What are some differing views of truth evident in our culture?

How are we to identify these false teachers? We know them by their unwavering commitment to falsehood and their departure from the church. In John’s day, these peddlers of deception gave evidence of their real character by leaving the church. “They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged

to us, they would have remained with us. However, they went out so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us.” These false teachers were nothing more than wolves in sheep’s clothing. As they persisted in unrighteousness, it became evident that they were never truly were a part of the believing community.

We still see the same thing today. Virtually every false teacher leaves the true, Christ-led church in order to start his own. According to these charlatans, everyone else is getting it wrong and they are the only ones getting it right. They prey upon the weak and unsuspecting. They are like clouds without water. They cannot deliver on what they promise—and they will one day stand before God and answer for their deceptions.

Thankfully, true believers “have an anointing from the Holy One, and ... know the truth.” This anointing is the Holy Spirit’s presence and indwelling, which all believers receive at the moment of their conversion. “You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him” (Rom. 8:9). The Holy Spirit is the ultimate teacher, guiding us into all the truth (John 16:13); therefore, He teaches and leads us as we study the Bible. As we rely on the Spirit of God, we are protected against error.

QUESTION 3:

How does the Holy Spirit help us discern truth?

ENGAGE

Fact-check

What are some ways you check to be sure biblical and theological teachings you hear or read are accurate?

1 John 2:22-26

22 Who is the liar, if not the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This one is the antichrist: the one who denies the Father and the Son.
23 No one who denies the Son has the Father; he who confesses the Son has the Father as well.

24 What you have heard from the beginning is to remain in you. If what you have heard from the beginning remains in you, then you will remain in the Son and in the Father.

25 And this is the promise that he himself made to us: eternal life.

26 I have written these things to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.

John also declared that every antichrist is a “liar.” The fact that they are anti—opposed to Christ—means they deny the reality of who Jesus is. The antichrist lies because he denies that Jesus is the Christ. And whoever denies the divinity of Jesus—that He is the Christ, the anointed One from God—ultimately denies the Father as well. A person cannot believe whatever he wants about God’s Son, Jesus Christ and think he can have a relationship with God the Father. To believe wrongly concerning Jesus is to believe wrongly about God. Why? Because Jesus *is* God. Indeed, He is God who came in human flesh.

The false teachers of John’s day blatantly denied the truth of who Christ is. The particular falsehood that was being taught was called Gnosticism. Gnosticism had two primary doctrinal errors.

1. Docetism. Docetic is from the Greek word *dokeo*, which means “seems” or “appears.” The Gnostics believed the body is evil. Therefore, God, who is Spirit, could not take on flesh. Thus, according to them, Jesus did not become a man. He did not come in the flesh, it only *appeared* that He did. They denied a real, human Jesus. This is a blatant denial of the incarnation: God becoming man.

2. **Cerinthianism.** Cerinthus was a contemporary of John. He taught that Jesus had a real human body, but that He was not the Christ until the Spirit came upon Him at His baptism. Cerinthus and his followers taught that the Spirit remained upon Jesus throughout His three years of public ministry, but the Spirit left Him before the crucifixion, since the Spirit could not be associated with suffering.

The Bible teaches that Jesus is fully God who came in human flesh (John 1:1-5,14). To deny either is defiance against God. Jesus is the eternal God who stepped out of eternity into time, clothed in human flesh, who died upon a cross, and rose from the dead.

About twenty years after John wrote this epistle, Polycarp (a disciple of John) sent a letter to the Christians in Philippi. He wrote:

“For everyone who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is an ‘anti-Christ’; and whosoever does not confess the testimony of the Cross is of the devil: and whosoever perverts the oracles of the Lord for his own lusts, and says that there is neither resurrection, nor judgment,—this man is the first-born of Satan.”⁶

For believers, though, John offered encouragement. “What you have heard from the beginning is to remain in you. If what you have heard from the beginning remains in you then you will remain in the Son and in the Father.” What they had heard from the beginning was the preaching of the gospel. They were to let the truth of the gospel remain and take up residence in them. They were to hold on to it and not be moved away from it.

The heart of the gospel message is that all who know the Father through the saving work of Christ His Son have the promise of eternal life. Eternal life is a gift from God to every person who

believes and trusts in Christ. So many people hope for eternal life, but eternal life is a sure promise for every believer in Jesus Christ because the truth is found in Him alone.

QUESTION 4:

What are some truths about Jesus that are difficult for many non-Christians to believe?

1 John 2:27-29

27 As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you don't need anyone to teach you. Instead, his anointing teaches you about all things and is true and is not a lie; just as it has taught you, remain in him.

28 So now, little children, remain in him so that when he appears we may have confidence and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

29 If you know that he is righteous, you know this as well: Everyone who does what is right has been born of him.

The proof of true salvation is not just believing the right thing. Conforming to the doctrine is not enough. Our belief should translate into right living. We are to pursue righteousness in light of the imminent return of Christ. John mentioned the return of Christ to motivate his readers to righteous living. Our attitude toward Christ's second coming says a lot about our spiritual state.

The return of Jesus is something I often think about. I long for the second coming of Jesus. The world in which we live is growing worse every day, and I am tired of battling with my own sin nature. I'm looking for Jesus to return at any moment, and because of that, I am seeking to live my life for His glory.

John urged his readers to "remain in Him." We are not to be moved away from the hope of the gospel. We are to hold to the Christ of Scripture, while living for the glory of God so that when Jesus appears, "we may have confidence and not be ashamed

before him at his coming.” John mentioned two of the benefits of remaining in Christ.

1. **Confident.** This could also be translated *boldness*. God desires that all will be prepared to meet Him and will have solid confidence in His return.
2. **Unashamed.** Sadly, many people do not have confidence; instead they carry the weight of guilt and shame. However, God desires that His people would remain in Him and thus have no reason to be ashamed when Jesus returns.

People’s reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic reflect a similar lack of beliefs and actions not matching up. In the early days of the pandemic, Italy was hit particularly hard by the virus. However, it was not due to a lack of testing or other action by the government in response, but rather, “People just did not take the coronavirus seriously enough to even slightly adapt their habits.” One journalist stated it succinctly: “I and many other Italians just did not see the need to change our routines for a threat we could not see.”⁶

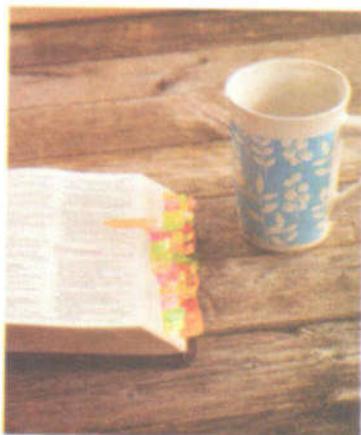
Because many people—including Christians—don’t see the return of Christ on the horizon, they may not see a need to change their routines or live with His return in mind. For the Christian, however, the right belief—including the belief that Christ is returning—must be consistently supported by the right ethic. We look to Christ—the Righteous One—and in response to the new birth He offers, we seek to live right in His power. “If you know that He is righteous, you know this as well: Everyone who does what is right has been born of Him.” That practical righteousness is proof of genuine salvation. We can be sure of our salvation, and we can be sure of the truth—the truth that is found through a personal relationship with Jesus.

QUESTION 5:

Why is abiding in Jesus vital to our living righteously?

LIVE IT OUT

- ▶ **Examine your life.** Have you genuinely embraced the truth by trusting in Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior? The fruit of your life will either give you confidence at the appearance of Jesus or cause you to shrink in shame. If you are unsure, then seek a pastor and share your concerns.
- ▶ **Align your life.** In light of Christ's imminent return, are your priorities in the right order? Are you faithfully reading and studying the Word of truth? Are you daily fellowshipping with the God of truth? If not, what changes need to be made to rearrange your priorities? This week do a thorough evaluation of your priorities and be honest with yourself. Remember, whatever God instructs you to change, it is for your good.
- ▶ **Express concern for others.** Do you know someone—a relative, neighbor, or friend—that needs to hear the truth? If so, then share the truth of the Gospel with them this week. Take it a step further and buy them a Bible as a gift.



END NOTES

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